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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER
3 December 1980

MEMORANDUM

Iranian Capability to Expand the War

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Summary

Iran still has sufficient capability to attack military or economic targets in any country on the Persian Gulf. Despite its war losses, Iran has an excellent chance to inflict considerable damage in such an attack because the Gulf states have relatively weak air and naval defenses, and the targets are highly vulnerable. Iranian air and naval personnel have demonstrated some proficiency in conducting such raids.

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Iranian Air Power

Iran is most likely to use its fighter-bombers in any future attack on the Arabian Peninsula.

- Iran's two airbases on the Gulf, Bushehr and Bandar Abbas, are within 30 minutes' flying time of most potential targets; both bases are being used by F-4s for war-related missions.
- Additional aircraft could stage from as far away as Tehran, using Iran's impressive airborne refueling capability.
- Iran probably still has nearly 100 operational fighter aircraft available; successful attack could be conducted by as few as two aircraft armed with gravity Maverick air-to-surface missiles.

This memorandum was prepared by [] Southwest Asia Analytic Center, Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis and [] Office of Strategic Research, in response to a request from the State Department. It was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia. Information available as of November 30, 1980 was used. Questions and comments may be addressed to Chief, Southwest Asia Analytic Center []

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- Past bombing missions against Iraq demonstrate that Iran has some capable pilots; accuracy of the strikes is likely to be increased where enemy air defenses are weak.

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Gulf Air Defenses

The air defense capabilities of the other Gulf states are poor.

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Iranian Naval Threat

Iran's Navy, despite serious equipment problems, could attack ships or offshore oil facilities.

- Most of the antiship missiles mounted on Iran's three destroyers and four frigates probably are not operational, but all seven ships have 115- or 127-millimeter guns that could inflict considerable damage employing the appropriate type of incendiary or armor-piercing rounds.
- Iran has only enough Harpoon missiles to arm fully two of its La Combattante fast patrol boats. Nevertheless, even one or two of the patrol boats, whose missiles have a range of more than 50 kilometers, could inflict serious damage.

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- Iran could also use its elite force of naval commandos as it has twice in the past month to all but destroy Iraqi offshore loading terminals near Al Faw. Commandos could be transported by Iran's fleet of 14 Hovercraft, and such an operation would be almost impossible to detect soon enough to counter.

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Gulf Vulnerabilities to Naval Attack

As in the case of airstrikes, Arabian Peninsula countries could offer little opposition.

- The Saudis have three torpedo-armed patrol boats but apparently no operational system to detect enemy warships.
- Oman has two missile-armed patrol boats operating regularly near the Strait of Hormuz. They could disrupt an assault against Oman or the UAE, but are too far south to help protect other countries on the Gulf.

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